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ABSTRACT

School-to-Career describes a system of integrated school-based and work-based learning that integrates academic and occupational learning in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) (Texas). Between August 1997 and May 1998, 9,662 students were enrolled in career and technology courses in the district. During the 1997-98 school year, the AISD conducted a study of selected School-to-Work programs to gather baseline information to use to monitor program performance in the future when more formal evaluation will be undertaken. The areas chosen for review were the cooperative education program and the career counseling program. AISD personnel were also surveyed about their knowledge of the School-to-Career process. Survey responses were received from 254 AISD employees. Survey results indicate that teachers, administrators, and other professionals have a favorable impression of the career counseling program and its relationship with local businesses. When 796 graduating seniors were surveyed about their experience with the career counseling program, they indicated that they had good understanding of graduation plan options and knew how their interests and abilities related to AISD's career clusters. However, these students indicated that they did not make full use of the services and activities offered through the career counseling program. When asked about the cooperative education program, students responded positively and indicated that they felt adequately prepared to complete the work required by their jobs. (Contains seven tables.) (SLD)

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FEEDBACK

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School-to-Career Program

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FEEDBACK

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SCHOOL-TO-CAREER PROGRAM

PURPOSE OF STUDY

School-to-Career describes a system of integrated school-based and work-based learning that integrates academic and occupational learning. Students are trained through a series of organized educational programs. These programs offer a sequence of courses that are designed to prepare students in paid or unpaid employment directly related to current or emerging occupations.

During the 1997-98 school year, the Department of School-to-Career and the Office of Program Evaluation collaborated on conducting a study of selected School-to-Career programs for the specific purpose of establishing baseline information that will be used to monitor program progress in future years, when more formal evaluation activities will be undertaken. The areas chosen for review were the cooperative education program and the career counseling program. In addition, AISD personnel were surveyed to obtain information on their general knowledge of the School-to-Career process. Since the evaluation was designed to provide baseline information for the School-to-Career program, only general recommendations about future evaluation activities will be offered.

SCHOOL-TO-CAREER STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Between August 1997 and May 1998, 9,662 students were enrolled in career and technology courses, based on counts reported in the October PEIMS submission. The majority (64%) of students were enrolled in high school. Review of enrollment data for the students shows that:

- 47% were female;
- 42% were Hispanic;
- 36% were Anglo/Other; and
- 20% were African American.

EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY

In spring 1998, the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) administered a districtwide employee survey. This survey is a coordinated effort among AISD's divisions and departments to gather information from employees districtwide that is pertinent to their department or division. OPE staff coordinated with staff from the Department of School-to-Career to identify questions to include in the survey that would be relevant to the department's operations and clientele. Teachers, other professionals (e.g., librarians, counselors), and administrators were asked about their school's career counseling program and relationship with the local business and industry community. Three hundred and fifty-five AISD employees were sampled in this survey, and 254 employees (72%) responded.

Responses in general were quite favorable. Teachers expressed the strongest agreement with the statement concerning their school's collaboration with sponsors from local business and industry. They expressed the greatest degree of uncertainty about whether the career counseling program at their school takes labor market data into consideration.

Other professionals expressed the strongest agreement with the statement that students at their school have identified career goals and plans to reach those goals. However, only 54% reported that students were prepared for occupations in which job openings are likely to be available.

Overall, administrators expressed the strongest positive feelings about the career counseling program as measured by the coordinated survey items. A summary of the survey responses is included in Table 1.

Table 1: Employee Survey Response Summary*

	Teachers			*Other Professionals*			*Administrators*		
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Not Sure	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Not Sure	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Not Sure	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
My school offers comprehensive career counseling programs and activities for all students.	64	19	17	78	3	19	88	0	12
Students at my school have identified tentative career goals and have a plan on how to reach these goals.	53	30	17	92	0	8	88	0	12
Graduating seniors at my school are prepared to make the transition from school to postsecondary education activities or to work.	52	31	17	74	12	14	75	25	0
Career counseling at my school takes into consideration labor market data.	38	52	10	75	14	11	75	25	0
Students at my school are prepared for occupations in which job openings are projected and available.	47	37	16	54	23	23	88	12	0
My school works in collaboration with sponsors from local business and industry.	78	17	5	82	2	16	88	0	12

*These numbers are expressed as percents.

CAREER COUNSELING SURVEY (GRADUATING SENIORS)

The district's career counseling program assists students in making and implementing education and career choices through an array of programs or services. These are designed to raise students' career awareness, orientation, planning, decision making, placement, skills and knowledge, and understanding. The program's ultimate goal is to prepare graduating students to enter the labor market equipped with skills for planning their education and career futures.

Formal academic and career planning with students begins districtwide with grade 6 students who complete the Individual Academic Career Plan (IACP) on their campuses. Students' IACPs are part of a process that encourages students to make changes along the way as they acquire new interests, insights, knowledge, and skills. With changes each year, students can develop new plans and goals. The IACP is a long-range plan that structures the career exploration process so that students are able to connect their

middle and high school courses with future goals, including college majors and skills needed to be successful in the workplace. Each subsequent year through 12th grade, the IACP is again developed.

In order to establish baseline information and customize future programs to better meet the needs of "tomorrow's students," AISD's career counseling program administered a survey to 796 graduating seniors in May 1998. Demographics for graduating seniors indicate that 47% are male, 17% African American, 31% Hispanic, and 49% Anglo/Other.

The 12-question survey polled graduating seniors about their perceptions of the career counseling program, their knowledge of career options, ability to make career decisions/future plans, and their participation in/use of departmental resources. The graduating seniors' responses, which will serve as baseline information for future evaluations, are presented in Tables 2-6.

Table 2: Perceptions of the Career Counseling Program*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school offers comprehensive career counseling programs and activities for all students.	15	32	35	12	6

* These numbers are expressed as percents.

According to the data reported in Table 2, 47% of the respondents agreed that their school offered comprehensive career counseling programs and activities. The fact that 35% of the respondents indicated that they were unsure about their school's offerings is not surprising since the career counseling program is a recent innovation in AISD high schools. However, a strong majority (69%) of the students agreed with the statement that their school works in collaboration with business and industry to provide students opportunities for work-based learning (see Table 3).

Table 3: Knowledge of School's Collaboration with Business and Industry*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school works in collaboration with business and industry to provide opportunities for work-based learning.	23	46	21	7	3

*These numbers are expressed as percents.

As can be seen in Table 4, 74% of the graduating seniors responding to the survey indicated that they understood the range of career options, skills, and education required for obtaining and succeeding in their chosen careers. The majority (67%) of these students also agreed that they were capable of demonstrating useful career planning and decision-making skills. Further, 63% of the respondents agreed that they can identify and use information and services required in making future decisions concerning job changes and career planning.

The graduating seniors who responded to this survey expressed the greatest agreement with statements concerning graduation plans and knowledge of career clusters. All of the respondents agreed that they understand available graduation options and that they know how their interests and abilities relate to career clusters available in AISD.

Table 4: Knowledge of Career Options and Ability to Make Career Decisions*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I understand the range of career options and the skills and education required for obtaining and succeeding in my career.	19	55	14	9	3
I can demonstrate career planning and decision-making skills and techniques that I will be able to use throughout life.	25	42	14	17	2
I can identify and use information and services required to make future decisions concerning job changes and career planning.	21	42	17	18	2
I have a good understanding of the graduation plan options available to me.	85	15	-	-	-
I know how my interests, abilities, and work-related values relate to career clusters.	75	25	-	-	-

* These numbers are reported as percents.

As can be seen in Table 5, more than half of the students responding to the survey indicated that they did not make use of career counseling-sponsored programs or facilities. Only 43% of the students reported that they have participated in programs about college and career planning, including financial aid. Also, 41% of the respondents indicated that they have used the College/Career Center in their high school. Again, these responses can be at least partially explained by the fact that the career counseling program is still relatively new to AISD.

In a related question, students were asked to indicate which Counseling Center programs they had used. The most frequently used services were reported to be individual counseling (26%) and academic planning (23%). These were followed by support groups (17%), information seminars (13%), and career planning (13%). Fewer than 5% of the respondents indicated that they had made use of couple's counseling, family counseling, or peer facilitators. However, according to the data reported in Table 6, only 46% of the students responding to the survey indicated that specific additional guidance activities would have been useful.

Table 5: Participation in/Use of Departmental Resources*

	Yes	No
I have participated in programs at my high school or by the District about college and career planning and/or financial aid.	43	57
I have used the College/Career Center in my high school.	41	59

* These numbers are expressed as percents.

Table 6: Needs Assessment*

	Yes	No
Additional guidance activities about relationships, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, etc. would have been useful to me and others.	46	54

* These numbers are expressed as percents.

Finally, students were polled concerning their plans for the next year. The majority (74%) of the respondents indicated they were going to pursue postsecondary studies. Fifty-eight percent of the students reported that they were going to seek bachelor's degrees at 4-year colleges or universities, and 16% were going on to community colleges in pursuit of associate degrees. Seventeen percent of the respondents indicated they would work full-time, while 2% reported that they would enlist in military service.

Cooperative Education Student Survey

The Department of School-to-Career oversees paid training opportunities between its cooperative education division and local businesses. Student participants are provided with opportunities for training in the basic skills of occupations and knowledge of related technical information through schedules of work experiences and paralleling course studies. In addition to providing practical instruction, the employers agree to pay the students for the work performed while undergoing training.

During the 1997-98 school year, 843 students were enrolled in cooperative education (co-op) courses. In May 1998, School-to-Career staff surveyed a sample of the co-op students to establish baseline information for the program and to evaluate the students' experiences and perceptions related to their co-op training and employment. Students from all ten AISD high schools participated in the survey.

The survey consisted of 26 questions addressing four major areas: job readiness; technical knowledge and skills at the time of initial employment; general information; and demographic data. Responses to survey items will establish baseline information for future evaluation activities and are summarized in Table 7. Responses to the items concerning demographic information are not included in the table but are summarized below.

Demographic Data

Of the 324 survey respondents, 56% were female. The majority (82%) of the students were in their first year of co-op classes at the time of the survey; only 1% of the respondents reported having taken co-op courses for three or more years. Approximately 88% of the respondents were at least 17 years of age at the time of the survey. In terms of co-op programs, 34% of the respondents were enrolled in marketing courses while 24% were enrolled in home economics cooperative education.

Job Readiness

Students were asked to indicate the degree of preparedness they felt when first employed in their co-op job in the areas of basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities. As summarized in Table 7, the survey respondents rated their job readiness skills very highly. In terms of basic skills, 87% of the respondents agreed that they were sufficiently prepared for their job. Eighty-two percent agreed that they were sufficiently prepared to use thinking skills, and 82% also agreed that they were sufficiently prepared in terms of personal qualities.

Table 7: **DISTRICTWIDE HIGH SCHOOL CO-OP STUDENT SURVEY SUMMARY RESPONSES***

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Job Readiness					
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use basic skills in your job.	58*	29	10	3	0
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use thinking skills in your job assignment.	52	30	14	3	1
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use personal qualities.	50	32	15	2	1
Technical Knowledge and Skills					
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use time management skills.	38	37	18	6	1
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use skills with money in your job assignment.	43	31	17	8	1
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use people skills in your job assignment.	56	34	7	2	1
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use interpersonal skills.	41	38	17	3	1
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use information skills.	33	37	22	6	1
When first employed, you were sufficiently prepared to use technology skills.	31	34	20	11	4
General Information					
The co-op class prepared me for employment in my co-op job.	34	32	22	9	3
My technical skills were taught in my co-op programs.	20	30	29	17	4
My training plan is the basis of my "on the job" training.	26	35	29	8	2
The classroom instruction I received is directly related to my co-op job.	21	31	31	12	5
I continually learn new skills on my co-op job.	33	36	23	6	2
What I do on my co-op job is not related to what I do in my co-op class.	14	19	25	25	17
My co-op teacher works closely with me as I work at my job.	30	35	22	8	5
I enrolled in co-op to learn the skills to be successful on my job.	37	27	24	7	5
I enrolled in co-op class because I need to work while I go to school.	40	26	22	9	3
My co-op job is directly related to the work I want to do when I graduate.	19	19	26	23	13
I enrolled in co-op to have ½ day away from the school campus.	21	18	22	25	14
I am a better prepared student because of the co-op class.	34	31	24	8	3
I am a better prepared co-op employee because of the co-op class.	32	39	22	4	3

* These numbers are reported as percents.

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Technical Knowledge and Skills

Students were asked to indicate the amount of preparedness they felt in using time and money management; and people, interpersonal, informational, and technology skills when first employed in their job assignments. The students' responses indicated that 75% felt they were sufficiently prepared to use time management skills; 74% agreed that they had sufficient skills when first employed to use money wisely; 90% were confident about their use of people skills; and, 79% felt they were sufficiently prepared to use interpersonal skills. However, in terms of information and technology skills, students expressed less confidence. Only 70% of the respondents agreed that they were sufficiently prepared to use information skills, while 65% percent indicated that they were prepared to use technology skills.

General Information

In general, students agreed that they were better prepared co-op students because of their co-op coursework (71%). While 66% of the respondents agreed that their co-op class prepared them for employment in their co-op job, only 52% reported that the classroom instruction they received was directly related to their co-op job. Further, only 38% of the respondents agreed that their co-op job is directly related to the work they want to do when they graduate.

When asked about the adequacy of the co-op curriculum, 61% of the students agreed that their training plan is the basis of "on the job" training. Also, 65% felt they were better prepared students because of the co-op classes.

Regarding their reasons for participating in the co-op program, most students agreed that they enrolled in co-op to learn the skills to be successful in their job and also because they need to work while going to school (64% and 66%, respectively). Only 39% of the respondents indicated that they enrolled in co-op to have time away from the school campus.

When asked about specific characteristics of the co-op job, 69% of the respondents agreed that they continually learned new skills on their jobs. Only 33% of the students felt that what they do on their jobs is not related to what they do in their co-op class. Finally, 65% agreed that their co-op teachers worked closely with them on their jobs.

Summary and Recommendations

During the 1997-98 school year, the Department of School-to-Career and the Office of Program Evaluation conducted several activities to establish baseline information for evaluation and program improvement efforts. As a result of these activities, it was determined that teachers, administrators, and other professionals have a favorable impression of the career counseling program and its relationship with local businesses. When graduating seniors were surveyed concerning their experience with the career counseling program, students indicated that they have a good understanding of graduation plan options and know how their interests and abilities relate to AISD's career clusters. However, the graduating seniors also indicated that they did not make full use of the services and activities offered through the career counseling program. An additional survey was conducted to determine student responses to the cooperative education program. In general, students responded positively to the experiences they had with the co-op program, and indicated that they felt adequately prepared to complete the work required by their job.

As a result of the evaluation activities undertaken during 1997-98, it is recommended that the Department of School-to Career continue to monitor student and staff opinions concerning the various programs offered by the department, and compare response rates to the baseline information already established to identify changes over time. In addition, course enrollments and graduation rates should be tracked for additional indications of program success.

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